

Background on U.S. Perfin Users

FLORIDA EAST COAST RAILWAY

This article includes both the background of a U. S. Perfin user and our Perfin Cover of the Month.

The Florida East Coast Railway was organized in 1886 by Henry Morrison Flagler. By 1896 the railroad extended from Jacksonville to Miami, then said to have been just a small Indian trading post consisting of two dwellings, a storehouse and the small stone Fort Dallas.

In 1904, Flagler made a decision to bring the Overseas Railroad (the Key West Extension) into being. Because of the seemingly impossible task involved, it became known as "Flagler's Folly."

The story of the Overseas Railroad is told in a small book, "The Railroad That Died At Sea," by Pat Parks, published by the Stephen Greene Press.

From 1912 to 1935 the extension served the Florida Keys from Miami to Key West through Homestead, Key Largo, Islamorada, Long Key Fishing Camp, Marathon, Big Pine Key, and Key West. The big hurricane that hit the Keys in 1935 caused the death of the railroad. Because of the damage done to the roadbed, the cost of rebuilding would have been prohibitive.

After the closing of the railroad, mail went by boat to the Keys. Eventually Highway No. 1 was built over the old roadbed and mail thereafter has gone by motor vehicle.

The Perfin Cover of the Month is a 1941 commercial cover, shown below in reduced form, which bears an R.P.O. cancellation reading "Jack. & Key West R.P.O./TR 76 /APR

16/1941" with "RMS" (for Railway Mail Service) in the barred-oval killer. It bears the corner card of the Florida East Coast Railway, with the name of R. Hill, Trainmaster, added. The stamps bear the FEC/Ry. Perfin.

This cover presents the apparent anachronism of the Jacksonville and Key West R.P.O. cancellation being used six years after the Overseas Railroad ceased to operate. The only logical explanation appears to be that the R.P.O. cancelling device simply continued to be used for some years on mail transported by motor vehicle.

Our thanks to Dick Carver for submitting this unusual cover, and to the Mobile Post Office Society, which apparently first ran the story.

Perfin Cover of the Month

